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Viewing cable 07ATHENS1521, GREECE: CRETAN GOVERNOR WANTS MORE USN SHIP VISITS

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ATHENS1521	2007-07-30 08:03	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001521

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2017

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SUBJECT: GREECE: CRETAN GOVERNOR WANTS MORE USN SHIP VISITS

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES THOMAS COUNTRYMAN. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a July 19 meeting with CDA, Governor (Nomarch) Grigoris Archondakis of the Chania district of Crete (where Souda Bay Naval Support Activity (NSA) is located) said it was important to get more U.S. ship visits, not so much for the economic benefits, substantial as they may be, but for the "political benefit" of demonstrating U.S. support. The governor, who ran on the New Democracy ticket, believed PM Karamanlis himself may not yet know when the next elections would occur -- the governor preferred October -- but said he advocated the PM take a more liberal (i.e., free-market) approach to governance issues. On economic issues, the governor said tourist revenues were up again this year by 6-7 percent and outlined several infrastructure improvements projects that indicated his district was on the upswing. END SUMMARY.

MORE SHIP VISITS, PLEASE

¶2. (C) Charge d'Affaires a.i. Thomas Countryman and DepPolCouns traveled to Chania to participate in the 99th meeting of the U.S.-Greece Joint Commission (reported septel) and to take part, respectively, in the high school and college programs of the Greek Association for Atlantic and European Cooperation. We also took the opportunity to pay a call on the governor, who was elected last October on a platform advocating more U.S. and other NATO ship visits. (NOTE: Archondakis replaced a socialist of PASOK's left wing, who actively sought to discourage NATO ship visits to Chania.

NATO obliged and the consequent drop in revenue to local businesses created sufficient economic pain for the local population that voters turned out the previous governor in favor of Archondakis. See reftel. END NOTE.)

¶3. (C) Archondakis said it was important to get more NATO, and especially USN, ship visits to Chania. This was not so much for the economic benefits that the visits would bring -- although those were substantial and much appreciated. Rather, it was for the "political benefit" visits brought in terms of showing U.S. support to the local community, which he claimed was very pro-U.S. despite a small, very vocal communist minority. Archondakis argued this was also the case in terms of increasing purchases of locally produced and/or supplied commodities by Souda Bay NSA. (NOTE: Souda Bay NSA estimates that apart from ship visits, the base itself annually pumps approximately 25 million USD into the local economy in terms of wages, rents, etc. The governor would like to see this increased by expanding NSA local procurement to show the local population that the USN is a good and valuable neighbor. END NOTE.)

ELECTIONS: SOONER THE BETTER

¶4. (C) PM Karamanlis himself probably did not know yet when he would call the next elections, according to Archondakis but the governor believed they should be called soon. He was aware of ND's recent slide in the opinion polls in relation to PASOK due to the social security bond scandal and the government's seeming inability to control forest fires, which had just a few days prior destroyed large forest areas on Crete. But the governor believed ND needed the elections before the next EU budget, which could cause further voter resentment.

¶5. (C) The governor also believed the PM should score the importance of the rule-of-law issue for the current government, with which the governor also agreed.

CHANIA ECONOMY ON THE UPSWING

16. (C) Chania was experiencing a "good tourist year," with revenues up six to seven percent, and most of these tourists were Scandinavians. To keep up with the tourist boom, the governor said an airport expansion was planned to be paid for by a tourist tax, as opposed to coming out of EU funds, which would be better spent on road projects. Roads were, in fact, a big problem, according to Archondakis. He had recently presented a 1.5 billion euro proposal to the Ministry of Construction for a road project, which would also be funded through tolls. In Souda Bay, a pier expansion was planned as well. These upward economic indicators were further bolstered by a thriving real-estate market, which the governor said was experiencing an increase in land prices.

17. (C) COMMENT: The Chania district has experienced a political sea change since the local elections last fall. Previously, we dreaded paying calls on local politicians, who used the opportunity for negative grandstanding. Now, the governor and other local officials welcome our visits and encourage us to send more USN ships. We agree with the governor's argument that more ship visits, as well as increased local purchasing by Souda Bay NSA, would provide significant political benefit. Souda Bay NSA is actively pursuing ways to increase its use of local procurement, and we encourage the USN to take advantage of the new welcoming attitude of Chania in its planning for ship visits.

COUNTRYMAN